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INAUGURAL

Speeches

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OF

WASHINGTON, ADAMS and
JEFFERSON.



Printed by H. Sprague, 1802.

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George Washington's Speech.

New-York, April 30, 1789.

FELLOW-CITIZENS OF THE SENATE, AND
OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

AMONG the vicissitudes incident to life, no event could have filled me with greater anxieties than that of which the notification was transmitted by your order, and received on the 14th day of the present month. On the one hand, I was summoned by my country, whose voice I can never hear but with veneration and love, from a retreat which I had chosen with the fondest predilection, and, in my flattering hopes, with an immutable decision as the asylum of my declining years : A retreat which was rendered every day more necessary as well as more dear to me, by the addition of habit to inclination, and of frequent interruptions in my health to the gradual waste com-

of every public and private good, I assure myself that it expresses your sentiments not less than my own; nor those of my fellow citizens at large, less than either. No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand, which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States. Every step, by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency. And in the important revolution just accomplished in the system of their united government, the tranquil deliberations and voluntary consent of so many distinct communities, from which the event has resulted, cannot be compared with the means by which most governments have been established, without some return of pious gratitude along with an humble anticipation of the future blessings which the past seem to presage. These reflections, arising out of

the present crisis, have forced themselves too strongly on my mind to be suppressed. You will join with me, I trust, in thinking that there are none under the influence of which, the proceedings of a new and free government can more auspiciously commence.

By the article establishing the executive department, it is made the duty of the President "to recommend to your consideration, such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient." The circumstances under which I now meet you, will acquit me from entering into that subject farther than to refer you to the great Constitutional Charter under which we are assembled ; and which, in defining your powers, designates the objects to which your attention is to be given. It will be more consistent with those circumstances, and far more congenial with the feelings which actuate me, to substitute in place of a recommendation

of particular measures, the tribute that is due to the talents, the rectitude, and the patriotism which adorn the characters selected to devise and adopt them. In these honorable qualifications, I behold the surest pledges, that as on one side, no separate views nor party animosities, will misdirect the comprehensive and equal eye which ought to watch over this great assemblage of communities and interests : so, on another, that the foundations of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality ; and the pre-eminence of a free government be exemplified by all the attributes which can win the affections of its citizens, and command the respect of the world.

I dwell on this prospect with every satisfaction which an ardent love for my country can inspire ; since there is no truth more thoroughly established, than that there exists in the economy and

course of nature, an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness—between duty and advantage—between the genuine maxims of an honest and magnanimous policy, and the solid rewards of public prosperity and felicity. Since we ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained. And since the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty, and the destiny of the republican model of government, are justly considered as *deeply*, perhaps, as *finally* staked, on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people:

Besides the ordinary objects submitted to your care, it will remain with your judgment to decide how far an exercise of the occasional power delegated by the Fifth Article of the Constitution is rendered expedient at the present juncture by

the nature of objections which have been urged against the system, or by the degree of inquietude which has given birth to them. Instead of undertaking particular recommendations on this subject, in which I could be guided by no lights derived from official opportunities, I shall again give way to my entire confidence in your discernment and pursuit of the public good: For I assure myself, that whilst you carefully avoid every alteration which might endanger the benefits of an ununited and effective government, or which ought to await the future lessons of experience; a reverence for the characteristic rights of freemen, and a regard for the public harmony, will sufficiently influence your deliberations on the question, how far the former can be more impregnably fortified, or the latter be safely and advantageously promoted.

To the preceding observations I have one to add, which will be most properly

addressed to the House of Representatives. It concerns myself, and will therefore be as brief as possible. When I was first honoured with a call into the service of my country, then on the eve of an arduous struggle for its liberties, the light in which I contemplated my duty, required that I should renounce every pecuniary compensation. From this resolution I have in no instance departed. And being still under the impressions which produced it, I must decline as inapplicable to myself, any share in the personal emoluments, which may be indispensably included in a permanent provision for the executive department ; and must accordingly pray that the pecuniary estimates for the station in which I am placed, may, during my continuation in it, be limited to such actual expenditures as the public good may be thought to require.

Having thus imparted to you my sentiments, as they have been awakened by

the occasion which brings us together, I shall take my present leave; but not without resorting once more to the benign Parent of the human race, in humble supplication, that since he has been pleased to favor the American people with opportunities for deliberating in perfect tranquillity, and dispositions for deciding with unparalleled unanimity on a form of government for the security of their Union, and the advancement of their happiness; so his divine blessing may be equally *conspicuous* in the enlarged views, the temperate consultations, and the wise measures on which the success of this government must depend.

John Adams' Speech.

Philadelphia, March 4, 1797.

WHEN it was first perceived, in early times, that no middle course for America remained ; between unlimited submission to a foreign legislature and a total independence of its claims ; men of reflection, were less apprehensive of danger, from the formidable power of Fleets, and Armies, they must determine to resist, than from those contests and dissensions, which would certainly arise, concerning the forms of government to be instituted, over the whole and over the parts of this extensive country. Relying however, on the purity of their intentions, the justice of their cause, and the integrity and intelligence of the people under an over-ruling Providence, which had so sig-

nally protected this country from the first, *The Representatives of this Nation, then consisting of little more than half its present numbers, not only broke to pieces the chains which were foregoing, and the Rod of Iron that was lifted up, but firmly cut asunder the teis which had bound them, and launched into an Ocean of Uncertainty.*

The zeal and ardour of the people during the revolutionary war, supplying the place of government, commenced a degree of order, sufficient at least for the temporary preservation of society. The Confederation, which was early felt to be necessary was prepared from the models of the Batavian and Helvetic Confederacies, the only examples which remain with any detail and precision, in History, and certainly the only ones, which the people at large, had ever considered.— But reflecting on the striking difference, in so many particulars, between this country and those where a Courier may go

from the seat of government to the frontier in single day, it was then certainly foreseen by some, who assisted in Congress at the formation of it, that it could not be durable.

Negligence of its regulations, inattention to its recommendations, if not disobedience to its authority, not only in individuals but in states, soon appeared, with their melancholy consequences ; universal languor, jealousies and rivalries of states ; decline of navigation and commerce ; discouragement of necessary manufactures ; universal fall in the value of lands and their produce ; contempt of public and private faith ; loss of consideration and credit with foreign nations ; and at length, in discontents, animosities, combinations, partial conventions, and insurrections, threatening some great national calamity.

In this dangerous crisis, the people of America were not abandoned by their us-

ual good sense, presence of mind, resolution or integrity. Measures were pursued to concert a plan, to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty. The public disquisitions, discussions and deliberations issued in the present happy constitution of government.

Employed in the service of my country abroad during the whole course of these transactions, I first saw the Constitution of the United States in a Foreign Country. Irritated by no literary altercation, animated by no public debate, heated by no party animosity, I read it with great satisfaction, as a result of good heads, prompted by good heart; as an experiment, better adapted to the genius, character, and relations of this nation and country, than any which had ever been proposed or suggested. In its general principles and great

was conformable to such a system of government, as I had ever most esteemed, and in some states, my own native state in particular, had contributed to establish. Claiming a right of suffrage in common with my fellow-citizens, in the adoption or rejection of a constitution which was to rule me and my posterity, as well as them and theirs, I did not hesitate to express my approbation of it, on all occasions, in public and in private. It was not then, nor has been since, any objection to it, in my mind, that the Executive and Senate were not more permanent. Nor have I entertained a thought of promoting any alteration in it, but such as the People themselves, in the course of their experience should see and feel to be necessary or expedient and by their Representatives in Congress and the State Legislatures, according to the Constitution itself, adopt and ordain.

Returning to the bosom of my coun-

try, after a painful separation from it, for ten years, I had the honour to be elected to a station under the new order of things, and I have repeatedly laid myself under the most serious obligations to support the constitution. The operation of it has equalled the most sanguine expectations of its friends ; and from an habitual attention to it, satisfaction in its administration and delight in its effects, upon the peace, order, prosperity and happiness of the nation, I have acquired an habitual attachment to it, and veneration for it.

What other form of Government indeed can so well deserve our esteem and love ?

There may be little solidity in an ancient idea, that congregations of men into cities and nations, are the most pleasing objects in the sight of superior intelligences : but this is very certain, that to a benevolent humane mind, there can be no spectacle presented by any nation, more pleasing more noble, majestic or august, than an

assembly like that which has so often been seen in this and the other chamber of Congress of a government, in which the executive authority, as well as that of all the branches of the legislature, are exercised by citizens, selected, at regular periods, by their neighbours, to make and execute laws for the general good. Can any thing essential, any thing more than mere ornament and decoration be added to this by robes or diamonds? Can authority be more amiable or respectable, when it descends from accidents, or institutions established in remote antiquity, than when it springs fresh from the hearts and judgments of an honest and enlightened people? For it is the people only that are represented; it is their power and majesty, that is reflected and only for their good, in every legitimate government, under whatever form it may appear. The existence of such a government as ours, for any length of time, is a full proof of

a general dissemination of knowledge and virtue, throughout the whole body of the people. And what object or consideration more pleasing than this can be presented to the human mind? If national pride is ever justifiable or excusable, it is when it springs, not from power or riches, grandeur or glory, but from conviction of national innocence, information and benevolence.

In the midst of these pleasing ideas, we should be unfaithful to ourselves, if we should ever lose sight of the danger to our liberties, if any thing partial or extraneous should infect the purity of our free, fair, virtuous and independent elections. If an election is to be determined by a majority of a single vote, and that can be procured by a party, through artifice or corruption, the government may be the choice of a party, for its own ends, not of the nation, for the national good. If that solitary suffrage can be obtained by

foreign nations by flattery or menaces, by fraud or violence, by terror, intrigue or venality, the government may not be the choice of the American people, but of foreign nations. It may be foreign nations who govern us, and not we the people, who govern ourselves. And candid men will acknowledge, that in such cases, choice would have little advantage to boast of, over lot or chance.

Such is the amiable and interesting system of government (and such are some of the abuses to which it may be exposed) which the people of America have exhibited to the admiration and anxiety of the wise and virtuous of all nations, for eight years, under the administration of a citizen, who, by a long course of great actions, regulated by prudence justice, temperance and fortitude; conducting a people, inspired with the same virtues, and animated with the same ardent patriotism and love of liberty, to independence and peace, to increas-

ing wealth and unexampled prosperity ; has merited the gratitude of his fellow-citizens, commanded the highest praises of foreign nations, and secured immortal glory with posterity.

In that retirement which is his voluntary choice, may he long live to enjoy the delicious recollection of his services, the gratitude of mankind ; the happy fruits of them to himself and the world, which are daily increasng and that splendid prospect of the future fortunes of his country, which is opening from year to year. His name may be still a rampart, and the knowledge that he lives a bulwark against all open or secret enemies of his country's peace.

This example has been recommended to the imitation of his successors, by both houses of Congress, and by the voice of the legislatures and the people, throughout the nation.

On this subject it might become me better to be silent, or to speak with diffidence : But as something may be expected, the occasion, I hope, will be admitted as an apology, if I venture to say, that

If a preference, upon principle, of a free republican government, formed upon long and serious reflection, after a diligent and impartial enquiry after truth ; If, an attachment to the Constitution of the United States and a conscientious determination to support it, until it shall be altered by the judgments and wishes of the people, expressed in the mode prescribed in it :—if, a respectful attention to the Constitutions of the individual states, and a constant caution and delicacy towards the state governments ; if, an equal and impartial regard to the rights, interests, honor and happiness of all the states in the Union, without preference or regard to a Northern or Southern, or Eastern or Western position, their various

political opinions on unessential points, or their personal attachments ; if a love of virtuous men of all parties and denominations ; If a love of science and letters, and a wish to patronize every rational effort to encourage schools, colleges, universities, academies, and every institution for propagating knowledge, virtue and religion among all classes of the people : not only for their benign influence on the happiness of life, in all its stages and classes, and of society in all its forms ; but as the only means of preserving our Constitution from its natural enemies, the spirit of sophistry, the spirit of party, the spirit of intrigue, profligacy of corruption, and the pestilence of foreign influence, which is the angel of destruction to Elective Governments ; if a love of equal laws, of justice and humanity, in the interior administration ; if an inclination to improve agriculture, commerce and manufactures for necessity, convenience and

defence ; If a spirit of equity and humanity towards the aboriginal nations of America, and a disposition to meliorate their condition by inclining them to be more friendly to us, and our citizens to be more friendly to them ; if an inflexible determination to maintain peace and inviolable faith, with all nations, and that system of neutrality and impartiality, among the belligerent powers of Europe, which has been adopted by this Government, and so solemnly sanctioned by both Houses of Congress, and applauded by the Legislatures of the States and the public opinion, until it shall be otherwise ordained by Congress ; if a personal esteem for the French Nation, formed in a residence of seven years, chiefly among them, and a sincere desire to preserve the friendship which has been so much for the honor and interest of both nations ; If, while the conscious honor and integrity of the people of America, and the inter-

nal sentiment of their own power and en-
 ergies must be preserved, an earnest en-
 deavor to investigate every just cause and
 remove every colorable pretence of com-
 plaint ; if an intention to pursue by ami-
 cable negociation, a reparation for the
 injuries that have been committed on the
 commerce of our fellow-citizens by what-
 ever nation ; and if success cannot be ob-
 tained, to lay the facts before the Legis-
 lature, that they may consider, what fur-
 ther measures the honor and interest of
 the Government and its constituents de-
 mand ; if a resolution to do justice, as far
 as may depend upon me, at all times and
 to all nations, and maintain peace, friend-
 ship and benevolence with all the world ;
 if an unshaken confidence in the honor,
 spirit, and resources of the American peo-
 ple, on which I have so often hazarded
 my all, and never been deceived ; if ele-
 vated ideas of the high destinies of this
 country, and of my own duties towards

it, founded on a knowledge of the moral principles and intellectual improvements of the people, deeply engraven on my mind in early life, and not obscured but exalted by experience and age ;—And, with humble reverence, I feel it to be my duty to add, if, a veneration for the religion of a people, who profess and call themselves Christians, and a fixed resolution to consider a decent respect for Christianity, among the best recommendations for the public service, can enable me, in any degree to comply with your wishes, it shall be my strenuous endeavour that this sagacious injunction of the two houses shall not be without effect.

With this great example before me ; with the sense and spirit, the faith and honor, the duty and interest of the same American people, pledged to support the Constitution of the United States, I entertain no doubt of its continuance in all its energy, and my mind is prepared, without

hesitation, to lay myself under the most solemn obligations to support it, to the utmost of my power.

And may that Being, who is Supreme over all, the patron of order, the fountain of justice, and the protector, in all ages of the world, of virtuous liberty, continue his blessing upon this nation and its government, and give it all possible success and duration, consistent with the ends of his providence.

Thomas Jefferson's Speech.

Washington, March 4, 1801.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW CITIZENS,

CALLED upon to undertake the duties of the first Executive office of our country, I avail myself of the presence of that portion of my fellow-citizens which is here assembled, to express my grateful thanks for the favour with which they have been pleased to look towards me, to declare a sincere consciousness that the task is above my talents, and that I approach it with those anxious and awful presentiments which the greatness of the charge, and the weakness of my powers so justly inspire. A rising nation, spread over a wide and fruitful land, traversing all the seas with the rich productions of their industry, engaged in commerce with

nations who feel power and forget right, advancing rapidly to destinies beyond the reach of mortal eye ; when I contemplate these transcendent objects, and see the honour, the happiness, and the hopes of this beloved country committed to the issue and the auspices of this day, I shrink from the contemplation, and humble myself before the magnitude of the undertaking. Utterly indeed should I despair, did not the presence of many, whom I here see, remind me, that, in the other high authorities provided by our constitution, I shall find resources of wisdom, of virtue, and of zeal, on which to rely under all difficulties. To you, then, gentlemen, who are charged with the sovereign functions of legislation, and to those associated with you, I look with encouragement for that guidance and support which may enable us to steer with safety the vessel in which we are all embarked, amidst the conflicting elements of a troubled world.

During the contest of opinion through which we have past, the animation of discussions and of exertions has sometimes worn an aspect which might impose on strangers unused to think freely, and to speak and to write what they think ; but this being now decided by the voice of the nation announced according to the rules of the constitution, all will of course arrange themselves under the will of the law, and unite in common efforts for the common good. All too will bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will, to be rightful, must be reasonable ; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal laws must protect, and to violate would be oppression. Let us then, fellow-citizens, unite, with one heart and one mind, let us restore to social intercourse that harmony and affection without which liberty, and even life itself, are but dreary things.—And let us

reflect that having banished from our land that religious intolerance under which mankind so long bled and suffered, we have yet gained little, if we countenance a political intolerance, as despotic, as wicked, and capable of as bitter and bloody persecutions. During the throes and convulsions of the ancient world, during the agonizing spasms of infuriated man, seeking through blood and slaughter his long lost liberty, it was not wonderful that the agitation of the billows should reach even this distant and peaceful shore; that this should be more felt & feared by some, and less by others; and should divide opinions as to measures of safety; but every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all republicans: we are all federalists. If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union, or to change its republican form, let them

stand undisturbed as monuments of the
 safety with which error of opinion may
 be tolerated, where reason is left free to
 combat it. I know indeed that some
 honest men fear that a republican gov-
 ernment cannot be strong; that this gov-
 ernment is not strong enough. But
 would the honest patriot, in the full tide
 of successful experiment, abandon a gov-
 ernment which has so far kept us free
 and firm, on the theoretic and visionary
 fear, that this government, the world's
 best hope, may, by possibility, want ener-
 gy to preserve itself? I trust not. I be-
 lieve this, on the contrary, the strongest
 government on earth. I believe it the
 only one, where every man, at the call of
 the law, would fly to the standard of the
 law, and would meet invasions of the
 public order as his own personal concern.
 Sometimes it is said that man cannot be
 trusted with the government of himself.
 Can he then be trusted with the govern-

ment of others? Or have we found angels, in the form of kings, to govern him? Let history answer this question.

Let us then, with courage and confidence, pursue our own federal and republican principles ; our attachment to union and representative government. Kindly separated by nature and a wide ocean from the exterminating havoc of one quarter of the globe ; too high minded to endure the degradations of the others, possessing a chosen country, with room enough for our descendants to the thousandth and thousandth generation, entertaining a due sense of our equal right to the use of our own faculties, to the acquisitions of our own industry, to honor and confidence from our fellow-citizens, resulting not from birth, but from our actions and their sense of them, enlightened by a benign religion, professed indeed and practised in various forms, yet all of them inculcating honesty, truth, temperance,

gratitude and the love of man, acknowledging and adoring an overruling Providence, which by all its dispensations proves that it delights in the happiness of man here, and his greater happiness hereafter; with all these blessings, what more is necessary to make us a happy and a prosperous people? Still one thing more, fellow-citizens, a wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government; and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities.

About to enter, fellow-citizens, on the exercise of duties which comprehend every thing dear and valuable to you, it is proper you should understand what I deem the essential principles of our government, and consequently those which

ought to shape its administration. I will compress them within the narrowest compass they will bear, stating the general principle, but not all its luminations.—equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political :—peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none :—the support of the state governments in all their rights, as the most competent administrations for our domestic concerns, and the surest bulwark against anti-republican tendencies: the preservation of the general government in its whole constitutional vigor, as the sheet anchor of our peace at home, and safety abroad: a jealous care of the right of election by the people, a mild and safe corrective of abuses which are lopped by the sword of revolution, where peaceable remedies are unprovided :—absolute acquiescence in the decisions of the majority, the vital principle of republics, from which is no

appeal but to force, the vital principle and immediate parent of despotism :—a well disciplined militia, our best reliance in peace, and for the first moments of war, till regulars may relieve them :—the supremacy of the civil over the military authority :—economy in the public expence, that labor may be lightly burthened :—the honest payment of our debts, and sacred preservation of the public faith :—encouragement of agriculture, and of commerce as its hand maid :—the diffusion of information, and arraignment of all abuses at the bar of the public reason :—freedom of religion ; freedom of the press ; and freedom of person, under the protection of the Habeas Corpus :—and trial by juries impartially selected.—These principles form the bright constellation, which has gone before us, and guided our steps through an age of revolution and reformation. The wisdom of our sages, and blood of our heroes,

have been devoted to their attainment :— they should be the creed of our political faith ; the text of civic instruction, the touchstone by which to try the services of those we trust ; and should we wander from them in moments of error or of alarm, let us *has* ten to retrace our steps, and to regain the road which alone leads to peace, liberty and safety.

I repair then, fellow-citizens, to the post you have assigned me. With experience enough in subordinate offices to have seen the difficulties of this the greatest of all, I have learnt to expect that it will rarely fall to the lot of imperfect man to retire from this station with the reputation, and the favor, which bring him into it. Without pretensions to that high confidence you reposed in your first and greatest revolutionary character, whose pre-eminent services had entitled him to the first place in his country's love, and destined for him the fairest page in the

volume of faithful history, I ask so much confidence only as may give firmness and effect to the legal administration of your affairs. I shall often go wrong through defect of judgment. When right, I shall often be thought wrong by those whose positions will not command a view of the whole ground. I ask your indulgence for my own errors, which will never be intentional ; and your support against the errors of others, who may condemn what they would not, if seen in all its parts. The approbation implied by your suffrage, is a great consolation to me for the past ; and my future solicitude will be, to retain the good opinion of those who have bestowed it in advance, to conciliate that of others, by doing them all the good in my power, and to be instrumental in the happiness and freedom of all.

. Relying then on the patronage of your good will, I advance with obedience to the work, ready to retire from it whenever

you become sensible how much better choices it is in your power to make. And may that infinite Power, which rules the destinies of the universe, lead our councils to what is best, and give them a favorable issue for your peace and prosperity.





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